

# Angels at the Crossroads

## CHAPTER 1

The chase was over. Jerry's car was almost out of gas. He'd outrun them when they had first pulled in behind him with their lights flashing as he headed home down U.S. 60. He'd floored the gas pedal, speeding well over a hundred, dodging other cars that spun off the road away from him and the police cars chasing him, and he'd lost them. He might even have gotten away, found a place to fill up and gone on to Louisville and who knew where after that. Maybe California. He'd run there once. He could do it again. But he'd wanted to see his mom and dad one last time before he ran again or the police caught him.

With an eye on his rear-view mirror, he'd cut through the country roads to get back to his farm. He knew the roads. He could have made it if only his gas needle hadn't been sitting on empty. A car's wheels stopped rolling without gas.

He had one last chance. He turned down a gravel lane he remembered from his school days where couples parked to make out. It was daytime. Nobody was there. He pulled down among the trees and hoped they'd give up the chase. He didn't pray. He didn't figure there was any use of that since he'd long since gone beyond the mercy of prayer. He just hunkered down behind the wheel and tried to be invisible.

But they found him. The car that pulled up behind him didn't have bubble lights on top, but its long antennas whipped in the wind. Without a doubt, police. They'd tracked him down and now it was time to pay for what he'd done.

Jerry kept his eyes on the car in his rearview mirror. They had been bound to catch him sooner or later, but he couldn't keep from wishing it had been later. He wanted, no needed to tell his parents goodbye, to see them one more time while he was still free. He'd been on the run for weeks. It was April 1969. Jerry was nineteen.

He'd thought about turning himself in. He'd done the crime. He was ready to pay for it, but he hadn't been able to decide how to do it. Even now he wasn't sure what to do as he pulled the mirrors down so he could better see the men climbing out of the police car. One of them walked slowly toward Jerry's car. At least his car now. Never really his car.

Jerry didn't have a gun, but he could make them think he did. Or he could just jump out of the car and take off running across the fields. They'd shoot. They'd shout at him to stop and then when he didn't, they'd shoot. He stared into the mirror at the man approaching his car and tried to decide if he looked like a man who could shoot. If Jerry ran, he'd want the man to be a good shot.

As his fingers touched the door handle to pull it up, he shifted in his seat and felt the Bible in his back pants pocket. Instead of opening the door, he reached around to take hold of the small serviceman's Bible the Gideons had given him what seemed like a lifetime ago while he was in basic training. He'd kept it with him through everything. He wasn't sure why. Courage maybe. Strength. Comfort. Definitely comfort. Now he knew he didn't want anybody else to get hurt because of him. Not even his parents, but it was way too late to be wishing that.

He didn't take the Bible out of his pocket, just curled his fingers around it. He watched the man in the suit and tie moving closer. The other man stayed at the car. He could feel the men's eyes watching for him to make some kind of move. Jerry's feet felt itchy and thoughts were exploding in his brain like a string of firecrackers all lit at once.

Then a calm voice bubbled up in his mind overpowering all the other thoughts. Peace be still. Peace be still. He gripped the Bible tighter and waited, hardly daring to breath.

The officer leaned down to Jerry's open window and asked, "Are you Jerry Shepherd?" The man looked older than his father and had gray hair and wary eyes.

"Yes, I am." It felt strangely good to admit that was his name after using another man's name these past weeks. A man who was dead because of Jerry.